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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [FR](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: GOF CLOSELY FOLLOWING IDF HOSTAGE CRISIS; WORRIED  
THAT SYRIA, IRAN WILL TRY TO GET INVOLVED

REF: PARIS 04173

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS  
ONS 1.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary and comment: An MFA contact told poloff July 6 that the GOF is closely following the Israeli/Palestinian crisis that began with the late June kidnapping of IDF soldier (and French/Israeli dual national) Gilad Shalit. Although the GOF has been rumored to be involved in negotiations for Shalit's release, the MFA contact said France is wary of becoming too involved and is, for the moment, focusing on regular contact with Shalit's family and on intelligence sharing. More generally, the GOF is worried that Syria and Iran are angling to use this crisis to increase their influence over the Hamas leadership within the territories and to undermine the peace process. The July 6 discussion underscores France's continued obsession with countering perceived Syrian influence in the region. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Poloff met July 6 with Martin Juillard, the MFA's acting DAS-equivalent for Egypt and the Levant. Juillard said the French Embassy in Tel Aviv has regular contact with IDF soldier Gilad Shalit's family. Shalit's French nationality derives from his father, and the family is registered in the Haifa consular district. Responding to a July 4 front page Le Monde article (largely taken from an article in London's al-Hayat newspaper) detailing possible French and Egyptian mediation efforts, Juillard said the article was essentially false, although it was clear that Egypt was making great efforts to mediate. Juillard said he "assumed" that French intelligence and police services were actively sharing information with their Israeli counterparts, but at the moment there was no "political" push to get more involved, in contrast to past GOF efforts to free their journalist hostages in Iraq.

13. (C) Juillard said he had the impression that most parties involved in this crisis, including certain "moderates" within the Gaza-based Hamas leadership, were looking to find a solution as soon as possible. He praised Israeli PM Olmert's actions, and said it was especially noteworthy that Olmert had managed to separate the hostage issue from the Gaza rockets issue. Juillard said the Israeli government understood that, based on past experiences, an IDF rescue attempt would likely result in Shalit's death. Olmert was focused on maintaining an "unstable equilibrium" between competing approaches within his government, and was being reasonably successful, said Juillard. (Note: Juillard's praise of Olmert and the Israeli government contrasts with the GOF's more critical public statements calling on Israel to exercise restraint and to release the Hamas ministers it arrested. However, it is in keeping with the recent improvement in French-Israeli relations, and the positive Chirac-Olmert meeting on June 14 (reftel). End note.)

14. (C) Turning to Syria, Juillard animatedly insisted that publicly calling on Syria to play a positive role in this crisis would be a "massive gift" to that country because Syria would use this to re-insert itself into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He acknowledged that it was "possible, even probable" that the hard-line Hamas leadership in Damascus was involved in the Shalit kidnapping. With regard to the Syrian regime, Juillard said its involvement was less clear. In any case, the GOF had decided not to mention publicly the word "Syria" in connection with the Shalit kidnapping. It was up to the Palestinians (Fatah and the Gaza-based Hamas government), the Israelis and the international community to resolve this crisis, said Juillard. If the crisis was solved by these actors, Iran, Hezbollah and Syria would suffer a defeat. The fox (Syria, but also Iran and Hezbollah) wants to enter the henhouse, Juillard concluded, and the international community must prevent this. He reiterated that France was open to playing a role, but preferred that the EU take the lead from the European side.

15. (C) According to Juillard, the crisis demonstrates the importance of working to divide Hamas leadership so that some of the Gaza-based leaders who are more moderate will no longer be tied to those in Damascus. In the 1990s, extremist PLO elements in other countries lost influence to Fatah, which was based in the Territories. We should seek to replicate this, said Juillard, so that the Gaza-based Hamas no longer takes instructions from the Damascus-based leadership, thereby reducing even further the role of Syria, Iran and Hezbollah in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
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